

Christmas in Belize

Species List | December 21 – 29, 2024

with Naturalist Journeys



Compiled by guide Stephen Grace with local guide Steve Choco. Our clients included Susan, Anthony, Lee, Tuffy, Brendan, Julia and Bobbie.

Our Christmas in Belize tour was an unforgettable journey through a stunning array of habitats, from the sun-flooded seashores to the mist-covered rainforests, the open savannahs to the lush riparian zones. Each environment provided its own birding treasures, captivating us with every new discovery.

One of the most magical moments came on a clear evening when we not only gazed at the stars, but also spotted the moons of Jupiter through our binoculars. In the tranquil stillness of the night, the calls of two Mottled Owls sounded from opposite sides of the road. A few moments later, we were rewarded with a close-up view of one perched in a nearby tree—an encounter that will remain etched in our memories.

A highlight of the tour was visiting Red Bank, where the vibrant Scarlet Macaws put on an unforgettable display, filling the sky with their striking colors and calls. We also learned about the important conservation efforts aimed at protecting these magnificent birds, which added a deeper layer of meaning to this awe-inspiring sight.

At the Tunich Ha Reserve and Ecological Center, we enjoyed a peaceful, rain-drenched morning on a lovely veranda, watching hummingbirds flit around as we tucked into a traditional Belizean breakfast. As we dined, we learned about an inspiring ecosystem education program for youth in Belize, a program that's helping nurture the next generation of conservationists.

Throughout the tour, we were guided by the expertise and boundless enthusiasm of Steve Choco, a talented Belizean birding guide. His deep knowledge and sharp eye made every sighting feel special. One memorable moment was witnessing the lively drama of Collared Aracaris and Keel-billed Toucans raiding the nests of Brown Jays along a river, a raucous spectacle. We also watched a White-tailed Kite swooping down over a savannah to steal a snake from a Laughing Falcon, a bold and dramatic moment.

In quieter moments, we were treated to beautiful views of a Green-tailed Jacamar and a Lesson's Motmot, both perched in the open for extended, soul-satisfying views. Several sightings of male White-collared Manakins were unforgettable highlights, leaving us with indelible memories of these charismatic birds.

The rainforest offered many thrilling experiences, including the sight of an Ornate Hawk-Eagle soaring above a jaguar preserve. While touring a cacao farm, where we savored delicious local chocolate, we spotted a majestic King Vulture circling jungle-clad mountains.

From the azure waters of the Caribbean Sea to the pine-strewn savannahs atop karst limestone mountains, from meandering rivers shaded by jungle foliage to the vibrant rainforests and ancient Maya ruins, this tour showcased Belize's rich biodiversity and cultural heritage. It left us with unforgettable memories, a long list of bird sightings, and a deep appreciation for the delicate balance of nature in this extraordinary country.

BIRDS 204 species were recorded, of which 17 were heard only, none were endemic, and 3 were introduced.

The eBird link below details the 204 species of birds our group observed during the tour. If you're new to eBird, be sure to click "Show All Details" on the right side of the list to expand the report and reveal where and when each of the birds were seen and how many.

[Christmas in Belize | Dec 20-29, 2024 | eBird Trip Report](#)

Following is a list of the mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and other taxa we were fortunate to observe during the trip.

MAMMALS (6 species recorded - plus various bats were identified)

Yucatan Black Howler Monkey *Alouatta pigra*— Heard often and observed pre-tour at Black Orchid Lodge, at Nim Li Punit, and on a rainforest walk near Punta Gorda.

Deppe's Squirrel *Sciurus deppei*— Observed several times on the grounds of Tanager Rainforest Lodge.

Central American Agouti *Dasyprocta punctata*— Seen every day at Tanager Rainforest Lodge, especially in the early mornings. We discussed how agoutis are keystone species and ecosystem architects in tropical forests. Their seed-dispersal behavior, particularly burying seeds like Brazil nuts, supports forest regeneration and plant diversity. Additionally, their ground tunneling aerates the soil, aiding nutrient cycling. Agoutis also serve as prey for predators, linking them to the broader food web and emphasizing their vital role in maintaining forest health.

White-nosed Coati *Nasua narica*—This charismatic racoon relative was spotted at Cockscomb Basin.

Gray Fox *Urocyon cinereoargenteus*—Observed crossing the road at BFREE Reserve.

Tayra *Eira barbara*—This medium-sized mustelid is a sleek relative of the fisher and marten and resembles a streamlined wolverine. Tayras are omnivorous, consuming fruits, small animals, and insects, and they play a vital role in seed dispersal. Excellent climbers, they can descend trees headfirst. Though widespread and common, they are elusive and rarely seen in their forest and plantation habitats. We were fortunate to glimpse one crossing the road on the way to Lubaantun.

Bats—Several species such as Sinaloan Mastiff Bat and Wagner's Mustached Bat were identified by their biosonar using Echo Meter Touch 2, a device that plugs into a smartphone.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS (5 species recorded)

Asian House Gecko *Hemidactylus frenatus (I)*— This introduced species was a constant companion in our accommodations, where it helps control insects.

Green Iguana *Iguana iguana*—Throughout the tour we observed Green Iguanas basking in the trees. These impressive reptiles, often called "tree chickens" locally, were a striking sight. During the breeding season, the males take on vibrant orange hues, adding a splash of unexpected color to the greenery.

Black Spiny-tailed Iguana *Ctenosaura similis*—Known for being the fastest lizard, capable of reaching speeds up to 21 miles per hour, we saw this species at Hopkins Bay.

Brown Basilisk *Basiliscus vittatus*—The Brown Basilisk, typically shy and quick to flee, surprised us at Tanager Rainforest Lodge. For two consecutive days, we managed to approach one of these fascinating creatures on the lawn, marveling at its stillness and unique appearance as we took close looks.

Gulf Coast Toad *Incilius valliceps*—Seen on the Placencia Peninsula.

FISH

Sergeant Major *Abudefduf saxatilis* – A striking tropical fish often seen in schools near coral reefs.

Great Barracuda *Sphyraena barracuda* – Sleek predators known for their speed and sharp teeth.

Blue Parrotfish *Scarus coeruleus* – A vibrant species with bright blue scales, commonly found around coral reefs.

Needlefish *Strongylura spp.*— Slender, fast swimmers with long, sharp jaws for capturing prey.

Southern Stingray *Hypanus americana*— Glides along the ocean floor, often seen resting on sandy substrates in shallow waters.

MARINE INVERTEBRATES

Red Cushion Sea Star *Oreaster reticulatus*— Known for its bright red color, this sea star is commonly found in the shallow waters of the Caribbean and is a slow-moving scavenger that feeds on detritus.

Feather Duster Worms Sabellidae family— These fascinating marine worms are known for their beautiful, feather-like crowns, which they use to filter feed on plankton and nutrients in the water. When disturbed, they quickly retract into their tubes for protection.

INSECTS

Leafcutter Ants *Atta sp*—Leafcutter ants use their mandibles to cut leaves from trees, sometimes carrying foliage that is many times their own weight. They carry the leaves back to their nests, where other ants chew them into a paste to feed to fungus. The ants tend to the fungus garden, removing destructive fungi and providing antibiotic bacteria. They harvest the fungus, which is a nutrient-rich food source for the colony. Leafcutter ants are one of the few animals other than humans known to cultivate a crop for food.

Blue Morpho *Morpho sp.*—This iconic butterfly of the Neotropics was seen many times throughout the tour.

Owl Butterfly *Caligo sp.*

Tiger Heliconia *Heliconius ismenius*

Zebra Longwing *Heliconius charithonia*

White Peacock *Anartia jatrophae*

Variable Cracker *Hamadryas feronia*—A master of camouflage, this butterfly keeps its wings spread wide when perched to blend with the surrounding environment. During mating, the male produces a distinctive “cracking” sound by rapidly opening and closing his wings, a behavior that helps attract potential mates and possibly deter rivals.

PLANTS

Black Orchid *Prosthechea cochleate*—The national flower of Belize, this attractive species, which is deep purple rather than black, was seen at Black Orchid Lodge.

Ceiba or Silk-cotton Tree *Ceiba pentandra*—Revered as the sacred “Tree of Life” by the Maya, this majestic tree plays a crucial role in the ecosystem. Its large canopy provides shelter and food for a variety of animals, including birds and insects. The tree's fruit and seeds also serve as a food source for local wildlife, and its towering height helps maintain forest structure and biodiversity. Its presence in tropical forests is essential for stabilizing the environment and supporting the overall health of the ecosystem.

Cohune Palm *Attalea cohune*— Vital to the Maya for its fronds, this palm is used in roofing and crafting, and its oil-rich nuts, which provide food and are used in cosmetics and medicine. Its versatility makes it an essential resource in Maya culture.

Caribbean Pine *Pinus caribaea*— Ecologically significant for its role in maintaining forest ecosystems, this pine species native to the Caribbean has resin-rich wood supports diverse wildlife, while its ability to thrive in poor, sandy soils helps stabilize the environment, making it a key species in tropical forest regeneration.

Rain Tree or Monkeypod Tree *Samanea saman*— Ecologically important for its wide canopy, which provides shade and shelters various species, this eye-catching tree also plays a role in nitrogen fixation, enriching the soil and supporting surrounding plant life. Its large, umbrella-like canopy creates a unique microhabitat in tropical environments. We saw a stunning specimen along a highway when we stopped to scan the sky for King Vultures.